



# JOURNAL OF MEDIA AND INFORMATION WARFARE

Centre For Media And Information Warfare Studies

Volume 1

JUNE 2008

ISSN 1985-563X

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Media Warfare: A Global Challenge in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

*Rajib Ghani*

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Strategic Communications and the Challenges  
Of the Post 9/11 World

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The Impact of Mobile Digital Technology  
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Global Media Versus Peace Journalism

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*Journal of Media and Information Warfare is joint published by the Centre of Media and Information Warfare, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies and University Publication Centre (UPENA), Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor Malaysia.*

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MEDIA WARFARE : A Global Challenge in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century <i>Rajib Ghani</i>	1
Strategic Communications and the Challenges Of the Post 9/11 World <i>Philip M. Taylor</i>	9
The Impact of Mobile Digital Technology On influencing Behaviors <i>W.Hutchinson</i>	19
Journalist in the Zone of Armed Conflicts: The need to Respect International Humanitarian Law <i>Azlena Khalid</i>	31
Outcome based education: A Computational Measurement on Special Librarian Intelligence Competency <i>Azrilah Abdul Aziz</i>	43
Constructing War Accounts in Malaysia <i>Che Mahzan Ahmad</i>	57
Non-Violence Approach: The Challenge in Philippine Broadcasting <i>Clarita Valdez - Ramos</i>	73
Global Media versus Peace Journalism <i>Faridah Ibrahim</i>	81
The Impact of Photo Images as Propaganda for Peace <i>Kamarudzaman Md. Isa</i>	105
Deleted mobile device's Evidences Recovery: A review <i>Yap Lee Fueng</i>	111

Our media and Our Violent Generations in the World: A Psychological Perspective <i>Ihshan Gumilar</i>	121
A Perception Assessment on Security Awareness in Malaysia Government Agencies in Malaysia Government by Rasch Model <i>Mohd Ismail Ahmad</i>	129
Social tension: the paradox of Malaysian online Journalism <i>Rahmat Ghazali</i>	145
No News Is Good News: What You See And What You Don't Get To See <i>Syed Alwi Shahab</i>	169
The Many Faces and Facets of War: Redrawing the Boundaries And Focus of Warfare in Contemporary and Focus of Warfare In Contemporary International Affairs <i>Tang Siew Mun</i>	177
Global Knowledge Structure, International Political Economy and Justice <i>Yuslinda Mat Yassin</i> <i>Munis Paran</i>	193
Media ethic: An Islamic Perspective <i>Muhammad Amanullah</i>	197



# Global Media Versus Peace Journalism

*Assoc. Prof. Dr Faridah Ibrahim*

## Introduction

The mass media and their contents are integral to shaping the course of events in time of peace and war. With the proliferation of technology which brings in more rapid and intense coverage of events around the world, the connection between events, places, leaders, and people become increasingly clear. News all over the world comes right into our living room via satellite television. Everything under the sun is news – from the frivolity of entertainment to the merriment of the political world, from the gruesome war to the wonderful peace, from the commoner on the streets to the royal elites, and from nothingness to the unknown frontiers. With the expansion of sophisticated technology and merger of media conglomerates, comes the affluent global media which changed the roles of traditional media landscape. Today the mass media are extensively being used as tools of globalisation. But even as the world globalised, there is a greater sensitivity to locality. It seems almost overnight globalisation has become the most controversial issue of our time, something that is being heatedly debated, from corporate boardrooms, conventions to the mass media, and from schools to universities and scholars all over the world.

With the interplay of influence that the global media have created, we may wonder what is to become of the much talked about peace options that the world population hunger for. Can global media bring world peace? Can Peace Journalism be the options that global media could initiate? These will be issue that will be dealt with in this paper.

Like propaganda, globalisation is a good word that turns bad. Proponents of globalisation says that it is associated with progress. It opens up international trade and helps many countries to grow far more quickly than they would otherwise have done. Because of globalisation

many people in the world live longer than before and their standard of living is better.

And central to this, are the global media, which make access to knowledge well beyond our imagination a century ago. But those who oppose globalisation have negative things to say. Globalisation has widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots and this growing divide has left increasing numbers in the world in dire poverty. If globalisation is not successful in reducing poverty, neither has it succeeded in ensuring stability. Crises in Asia and Latin America still prevail and have threatened the economies and the stability of all developing countries. The critics of globalisation accuse Western countries of hypocrisy but the West admits not guilty. But even in the midst of this global controversy, the West seems to be pushing harder in their globalisation agenda.

Malaysia's fourth prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad once said "Globalisation, a borderless world, is already a fact. In the field of information distribution and e-commerce, borders mean very little now. But the fact that globalisation has come does not mean we should just sit by and watch as the predators destroy us" (2002:137). Mahathir has stressed in many of his speeches which are being compiled in his book, *Globalisation and the New Realities*, that he is a believer of the market system, capitalism and globalisation but his main criticism is that the major players in the system have devised unfair rules of the game for their own benefits.

Likewise, current Malaysia prime minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (2004) reiterated that while globalisation has resulted in much greater good, this information and technology revolution and the appeal of democracy have also made the governance of multicultural societies more difficult. This is because with globalisation there is a temptation to insist on a one-size-fits-all model for all countries. But, unfortunately this approach fails to adapt to local peculiarities and characteristics, and hence creates more problems than it solves.

It is interesting at this point to look at how the Americans view globalisation. A case in point is the notion of "McDonaldisation" of the world, an argument developed by George Ritzer and popularized by Thomas Friedman. In this notion, a popular way in which globalisation is institutionalized states that any two countries which have McDonald restaurants have not gone to war with each other. Ironical it may be,

but an important point is worth noting. Such notion indicates that there is a great need for us, especially people in the developing and underdeveloped countries, to intensify efforts in awareness raising, particularly on global institutions. Efforts on critical media awareness and understanding media content and global media, need to be intensified at all levels - from the personal level to the institutional level; and from local government to various world organizations.

## **Global Media: Some Definitions**

Mass media can be considered as one of the most powerful expressions of the “spirit” of our age. Whatever spirit, sentiments, emotions, intelligence and others that fall under the category of news and information that are being said and shared via the mass media today became instant history which could be read or accessed by people in the unforeseen future. Over the decades, we have seen many innovations and achievements of science but few influence our day-to-day existence so frequently as the media.

Mass media in the globalised world are undergoing a massive change and undeniably, technology is the driving force behind it. With the introduction of Internet and its new-found capability known as the Web, the supplies of news and information become plentiful and the process of news selection becomes more challenging. Technological advancement has created new alternatives in newsgathering and production, new ways of disseminating news and new ways of promoting and selling media products (Faridah 2001).

Globalisation has brought many challenges and the media, both newspapers and electronic, need to realize that the population especially the younger generation still want their news and information but their expectations have changed in recent years, due to the influence of globalization and the global media.

Media management scholars, John M. Lavine and Daniel B. Wackman (1988 : 19-21) postulate that the advances in technology in the media world have three important effects. First, the advancement have given media practitioners more control over their work especially with regard to news and information gathering, production and dissemination. Second, technological innovations have opened up new



opportunities for highly trained people from various disciplines such as computer programmers and technocrats to join media industries. Third, technological developments have also expanded the possibilities for more entrepreneurs to embark on their own media ventures, through mergers, interlocking or tie-ins, concentration and so on, that heightened the impact of media industries such as mergers with production companies, film studios, publishers, broadcasting stations and the like. These mergers have in fact created massive media concentration among media giants at the global level.

What does global media system mean? Nichols and McChesney (2000 : 56) state that the global media system is "the province of some seventy or eighty firms that provide the vast majority of the world's media fair". They identified two distinct tiers among these big players. The first tier comprises of eight transnational media conglomerates. These are AOL-Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, News Corporation, Viacom, Sony, AT&T, and Vivendi Universal. These groups collect between \$10 billion and \$30 billion per year in annual media-related revenues. These firms tend to be dominant players in numerous media sectors and to do business all across the world.

The second tier, which comprises the remaining sixty to seventy firms are smaller ones which tend to concentrate more upon one or more media sectors, and are more likely to be national or regional power-houses.

Within this global media system, the industry adopted several striking features such as strong alliances within the industry and between the industry and such sectors as the defence establishments of major industrial countries. The industry is also identified by its need for large volumes of finance capital, the role of media tycoons, and the development of consolidated mega-conglomerates (Hamelink 1994).

According to Hamelink (1994) throughout the 70's and mid 80's the communication industry became largely controlled by a network of large transnational corporations with strong interlocking interests. On the surface it looked as if the international production and distribution of communication goods and services were carried out by small, but competitive groups. But closer analysis, revealed that an intricate web of interlocks characterized the information industry.

There were direct interlocks in the form of joint ventures and joint ownerships (such as between Philips and Siemens with Polygram); stockholdings (such as in the case of General Electric holding 11

per cent of the stock in Toshiba, Philips holding 24.5 per cent of the Grundig etc); licensing, supply, sales or production agreements (such as between Fujitsu and Siemens, Honeywell and Nippon Electric, Xerox and Mitsubishi, Interpublic and CBS and the like).

Another issue of global concern that involves the US and other G-7 nations, is the degree of media decentralization or concentration. Everyone agrees that some degree of pluralism brought by concentration, is essential to the functioning of democracy. Whilst some claim that a wide variety of media voices can be heard, others maintain that the actual range is relatively narrow and is narrowing even further.

In short, we may see that a limited number of large G-7 media companies control most of the transcontinental flows of media material. G-7 is shorthand for the Group of Seven of major industrialized nations: the US, Canada, the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. The G-7, which is also known as the group of 'free-market' industrialized nations allied within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), dominates the entire spectrum of media material. Whereas the G-7 nations have less than 10 per cent of the world's population, they probably dominate as much as 90 per cent of transcontinental flows of media material.

Some feel this is a good thing, since they have accumulated long experience with media professionalism. Others feel it is bad, since a minority of the world's population tends to shape the news and views of a majority. Furthermore, it scares many to know that through mergers and concentrations, an ever-decreasing group of ever-larger conglomerate is dominating key parts of the entire media spectrum.

The debate about media decentralization and concentration in the developed countries peaked in the US during the early eighties, and resurfaced in the EC in the early nineties. A book by Benjamin M. Compaine and Douglas Gomery, *Who owns the Media? Competition and Concentration in the Mass Media Industry* (2000) was perhaps the first comprehensive overview of media ownership covering about 35,000 to 40,000 American media outlets, which in actuality were dominated by a much more limited and smaller number of large conglomerates. They said, "Of these, 11 are dominant in newspapers, 16 in broadcasting, 16 in magazines, 14 in book publishing, 9 in cable and 10 in motion picture distribution" (p.349).

Compaine and Gomery (2000) also noted that media concentration comes in three types of combinations: vertical integration (for example,



a publisher owning a distributor, a printer and a paper manufacturer); horizontal integration (for example, a newspaper chain having an interest in a broadcasting company) and conglomerate mergers (for example, a non-media firm having a major stake in a media firm). They found that behind these mergers is the role played by technologies which blur the boundaries of traditional media formats and content. Table 1 shows some interlocking networks and concentration currently being practiced with the global media.

**Table 1 :** Global Players

Time Warner Inc	Time Warner Turner, which operates in 70-plus countries, is among the world's largest media companies, Own CNN, TNT, Cinemax, Worldwide, Time Warner Turner. Owns Warner Bros, Studio and Records, Warner Books and dozen other book publishers, In Latin America , the company has adapted its HBO pay-tv service and calls it HBO Ole. Also has alliances with Itochu and Toshiba. AOL takes over in 2000.
Disney-ABC	Disney became one of the world's largest media companies in 1995 when it acquired Cap Cities/ABC; Owns Walt Disney Music. Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, Touchstone Pictures, Disney theme parks in California, Florida, Tokyo, Paris.
Viacom	Viacom's MTV has been an entrée into foreign markets. The music video network reaches 240 million households in 63 countries; owns Nickelodeon satellite network; and various publishing companies including Allyn and Bacon
News Corp	Australian born Rupert Murdoch owns News Corp , the interest of which go far beyond his 20th Century Fox movie studio. Owns various US newspapers and magazines, and also in Australia and Britain. In Asia, his satellite TV beams signal to China, India, Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Bought over MTV, ESPN and Bart Simpson. Owns Sky Broadcasting which sends signal to Europe

Bertelsmann	The German company established itself globally as a book and magazine company. Have 200 subsidiaries in 25 countries. In the US these include Random House, Bantam, Dell and Doubleday books. Also owns RCA records.
Hachette Filipacchi	French-Italian company publishes 74 magazines in 10 countries, This includes the 4.4 million Woman's Day. Bought CBS magazine empire in 1988. Also owns US fashion magazine, <i>Elle</i> .
Televisa	Mexico media giant. Operates throughout Latin America, people watch soap operas, called Telenovelas. TVB Hong Kong based TVB started in Asia on Asian TV-satellite service. Production runs 6000 hours in both Cantonese and Mandarin.
TV Globo	A Brazilian media company, TV Globo, with a global audience. Its telenovelas air in all the Spanish speaking and Portuguese speaking countries and beyond, including China and South East Asia.

Adapted from John Vivian. 1991. *The Media of Mass Communication*. MA: Allyn and Bacon; and Benjamin M. Compaigne and Douglas Gomery. 2000. *Who Owns the Media*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

## **Global News And Global Media**

In dealing with transborder flow of information and issues concerning global news via global media, some foreign governments are openly against certain technologically rich nations such as America and Great Britain. Four large news agencies dominate the distribution of global news and all four are Western-based – the United States' Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI), France's Agence France Press (AFP) and Britain's Reuters. The Cable News Network (CNN), which is a U.S based transnational corporation, joined in the transmission of world news via satellite later in late eighties. Hence, a major complaint raised by many Third World countries is that the West dominates the international flow of information and that news disseminated has a Western slant.

Many Third World leaders complained that the Western news agencies are disrupting the free flow of news, distorting the realities of the developing nations, and are presenting negative images of the Third World. News from the Third World is too biased and too heavy on items of war, poverty, illiteracy, riots, revolutions, antics of national leaders, social disruption, natural calamity and the like.

Various studies on the coverage of international news by these international news agencies found that majority of the news about foreign countries highlighted were of negative directions while the agencies' countries of origins were more positive (Faridah Ibrahim, 1984; Faridah and Rahmah 1996; Mohd Rajib and Faridah, 1996; Faridah Ibrahim, 2000; Faridah Ibrahim and Mohd Safar 2005).

Faridah and Rajib (1996) looked at the coverage of human rights issues in five Malaysian dailies namely *Utusan Malaysia*, *News Straits Times*, *Sun*, *Berita Harian* and *The Star* from the perspective of source bias and journalistic bias. In the source bias category, it was found that AP focuses on neutral category (44.4 per cent), followed by unfavourable (22.2 per cent) and balanced (22.2 per cent). Reuters gives more emphasis on favourable direction (35.6 per cent), 33.3 per cent balanced and 20 per cent unfavourable. AFP focuses more on unfavourable directions (36.4 per cent). The newspapers' own staff-journalists focus more on favourable (39.4 per cent) and neutral directions (36.7 per cent).

The findings also showed that the writers or journalists, especially the western news agencies, when writing about human rights' news are sometimes consciously or unconsciously involved in "colouring" stories and taking "sides" on certain issues they cover.

A local study in Malaysia on the usage of news sources and news agencies in 12 Malaysian newspapers (Faridah and Mohd Safar 2005) found that foreign news supplied by international news agencies, particularly Reuters, AFP and AP (local media use less news from UPI) are slanted more towards negative and neutral directions as compared to positive and balanced directions. The study found that there are lesser news of negative orientations if the news are covered by the Malaysian news agency, Bernama or the newspapers' own staff. The study also found that local gatekeepers in both print and broadcast media have no choice but to use foreign news supplied by international news agencies because of superior footage and visuals as well as a wider, extensive



and up-to-date coverage. Furthermore, the local media organizations are handicapped due to the fact that they only have a minimal number of foreign bureaus because of budget constraints.

In a way, the current situation echoes the main comments that were made during the New World Information Order debate in the 80's where distorted, negative treatment of the Third World in the Western media is transferred to the Third World itself because of the latter's dependence on the Western news agencies.

Studies on news content and production have also been dealt in great length both by international and local scholars. At the international level studies on the production and consumption of news and information content (Crouse, 1973; Epstein, 1973; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980) have critically analysed how journalists routinely cover and distribute news.

Based on a comprehensive survey on news production literature, Bennett (1988) found four dominant practices by media which tend to distort news content. First, by personalizing the news. Most people relate better to individuals than to groups or institutions, so most news stories are centred on people. In a way this has led the news audience to project their own private feelings and fantasies directly on public life.

Second, by dramatizing the news. News, like all media commodities, need to be attractively packaged to attract audiences. One way is through dramatization which among other things capitalizes on the narrative structure that include problem and denouement; rising action and falling action; a beginning, a middle and an end – just like a novel or a movie.

Third, by fragmenting news in order to present news in brief, capsulised reports of events. By doing this, journalists can actually fulfill their norm of objectivity. These stories might meet the norm of being "balanced" but they do not assist the audience in making sense of things.

And fourth, by capitalizing on normalized news where news on disasters or about social movements tend to "normalize" these potential threats to the status quo. Elite sources are allowed to explain disasters and to challenge movement members. Elites are presented as authoritative, rational, knowledgeable people who are effectively coping with threats. The news package tends to accentuate their potentials and skills in bringing things back to normal.

Along this argument, Galtung and Ruge (1960) propose two principles concerning how news evaluation and selection operate. First, a story is more newsworthy if it contains more than one news factor. Second, lack of one factor can be compensated for possessing another factor. For instance, a non-elite nation can get in the news through negativity (for examples coups, earthquakes, tsunamis). Without negative elements, news about non-elite nations will not find itself on the front page of leading world news dailies such as *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and *Le Monde*. Another criteria of news value is consonance (fulfilling political stereotypes) or having an elite - or at least a well publicized leader (Libya's Colonel Gaddafi).

Based on these two factors, Galtung and Ruge identified 12 factors which have found to be valid and enlightening for a wide range of news types in many countries. These 12 factors include conflict, recency, consonance, ambiguity, novelty, unexpectedness, threshold, relevance, personalization, eliteness, attribution and facticity. Having identified these factors, it is easy to understand why major stories in international news or local news are those that highlight negativities such as demonstrations, riot and wars.

Tuchman (1978) studied how the values held by journalists influence news even when considerable effort is made to guard against that influence. She observed journalists as they covered social movements and concluded that production practices were implicitly biased toward support of status quo. For instance, in the plight to achieve objectivity and balanced news reporting, reporters than try to "balance" quotes taken from controversial movement leaders with those taken from mainstream group leaders, which are often conventional in nature. Hence, the casual methods of journalists in selecting quotes, and their use of elite sources led to news stories that were harmful to several movements' and nations' leaders.

The choice of negativity as a newsworthy story has been a universal yardstick for a very long time. A very early study by Oliver Boyd Barrett (1980) on the international news agencies found that news stories that were more likely to be selected by their correspondents for transmission were if they were concerned with a capital city or major metropolis, if they had clear international repercussions, violence, clearly established general market interest and if the news sources were prestigious.

However, current trend shows a more proactive practice by world



news services such as CNN, BBC, and the Big Four to hire locals to be their correspondents. According to Hachten (1999) although locals are hired, they normally report according to the interest of their employers. Furthermore, the Western media tend to place sensational and negativities ahead of serious news reporting and hence serious economic and political news also tend to be sensationalized.

According to Fink (1988) the Third World nations have made numerous attempts to launch international news collection and distribution system by expanding their own national agencies. But costs are enormous. Furthermore western agencies are competitively dominant and bickering between the Third World countries prevents cooperation in news exchange.

Nevertheless, the over reliance of many nation states on the global media to provide news and information, has led to the emergence of alternative world media like Al-Jazeera, the Gulf-based satellite TV channel, that stationed their correspondents all over the globe, including Malaysia. This is just one alternative voice at odds with such orchestrated global media which have been in operation for decades. Perhaps today, CNN or BBC no longer monopolise the world audience. There are other international broadcasts that are already in the global media spectrum. Apart Al-Jazeera from the Middle East, there is Televisa in Mexico, Globo Television in Brazil, Radio Caracas Television in Venezuela which have already entered the US market, and there are also broadcasts from various Asian countries. Since 2005, Malaysia has anchored the South-South Information Gateway (SSIG) that becomes a news dissemination center for South-South nations.

## **Issues And Criticism Of Global Media**

Although globalisation has many benefits, it is widely criticized. Small nations argue that their power is challenged and undermined by multinational corporations (MNCs) or by foreign media content that promotes global norms and values. The airwaves of many small nations are flooded with U.S-produced content – both information and entertainment - because it is sold to broadcasters at prices much below what it would cost to produce the programme locally (Baran and Davis 2000). Simultaneously, MNCs often drive hard bargains with small nations, threatening to move their operations elsewhere if local laws are passed that restrict their freedom or increase their operating costs.

One of the most disturbing complaints against globalisation is that it undermines and erodes local cultures. Hollywood movies and cultures portrayed by Western actors, actresses and singers are said to influence local society in terms of values and behaviours. Along similar lines, Samuel Huntington (1996) in his book *The Clash of Civilisations* argues that efforts to create a favourable climate for global business have resulted in negative reactions from local people. For instance, many fundamentalist groups are gaining power and support in Middle Eastern countries and several other smaller countries by arousing local resentment against global organizations and countries that produce them. The 9/11 incident and other bombings in recent time have been associated with these contentions.

Other arguments raised by other scholars are the question of identity. It is a futile effort for an individual to search for his or her identity in a world where national boundaries are becoming irrelevant (Morley and Robbins 1995). During the past century, mass media have played an important role in creating and reinforcing national identities. But today, with the proliferation of sophisticated technology, new media are emerging everywhere and simultaneously promoting many different cultural and social identities. Can people differentiate between what's local and global culture? This question is likely to be less important for Americans and the developed countries but will be of great significance for people in smaller nations that are being absorbed into the larger international communities through the process of globalisation.

Indeed, globalisation is clearly a much more complex phenomenon than was the effort to spread communist and capitalist ideologies during the Cold War. Global capitalists are primarily interested in producing and distributing commodities so they can earn profits. Big media corporations like those run by Murdoch and Turner are happy for as long as their movies sell well and their news and entertainment commodities earn profits.

Such were the arguments forwarded by Herbert Schiller in the 70's when he wrote about cultural imperialism. Among his contentions were that American aid programmes to developing countries, and the 'free flow of information' policies promoted by the West, powerfully assisted the Western media in their drive to achieve international domination. The expansion of Western media content and business corporations including the MNCs promoted capitalist and consumerist values, and

eroded local cultures.

To be strong, viable, influential and dominant, there is a trend towards a consolidation of media ownership, which is practiced not only the U.S but also by many giant corporations in other countries including Malaysia, in the form of Media Prima. The trend toward consolidation or conglomeration involves a process of mergers, acquisition and buyouts that consolidates the ownership of the media into fewer and fewer companies.

Besides consolidation, the remaining giant companies have joint deals. For instance Ted Turner who created CNN, and Rupert Murdoch, who created Fox are intertwined in deals. One example: Time Warner, which owns CNN, carries Fox news on some of its cable systems. Murdoch's News Corporation, which owns Fox, carries Warner programming on its satellites. News Corporation also has deals with Disney, whose properties include ABC; General Electric, whose properties include NBC; Westinghouse, whose properties include CBS and manifold others. All the big players are in television, and film production, Internet content, home video, interactive programs, cable, electronic games and sport teams, books, music and records, newspapers, magazines, telephones and wireless communications. Sound like many spiders on a big web? As media critic, Ken Auletta (1997 ) puts it: "When a spider moves, the entire web sways".

To sum up, some of the major criticisms against global media are: similarity in content that gives audience little range of choice; quality is sacrificed to cut cost and maximize profit; corporate instability is rampant due to profit-driven owners who put aside quality; and the rise of anti-intellectualism where conglomerate executives use chain-of-command authority to squash programmes they do not like and support those that they like. Some of the positive effects of global media are: the conglomeration made them financially stronger and this enabled them to provide better and quality products and services to audience all over the world; the opportunity for media owners to turn into builder entrepreneurs.

Consequently, during the 80's and 90's the idea of media imperialism came under attack by Western scholars who argued that the global flow is 'multi-directional'. People's lives are becoming more penetrated by influences through increased migration, overseas tourism and the 'indirect travel' experienced through watching television (Curran



2002). John Tomlinson (1991) rejects the idea that Western culture via global media is imposed on developing nations and argues that non-Western countries are both active and selective in the ways in which they assimilate Western influence.

Meanwhile, local media owners are accused of having their fair share of the benefits brought by globalisation. Fashioned after the ever-popular content from the global media that capitalize on information and entertainment, Malaysian media content, both print and broadcast also have similar offerings.

Entertainment has become a fast growing industry in the West. Entertainment, not oil, not steel, not financial services – is fast becoming the driving wheel of the new world economy. Entertainment products from the west, especially the United States, are not only being consumed by local markets but also transcend all over the world and are being consumed by the billions. Because of its pervasive influence and in every way has become a way of life, entertainment information has been dubbed religio-entertainment.

Today, this information is being transmitted via the mass media and is fast seeping through the lives of people all over the world. The mass media which was once the traditional vehicle for accountable journalism is now becoming a natural conduit for religio-entertainment. While most world prestige newspapers still uphold the ideals in disseminating accountable journalistic news, most news media be it newspapers, magazines and televisions intended for mass consumptions fall short of this standard. On the whole these mass media seem to offer the relatively superficial, diverting, entertaining news the public seems to want. The mass media in Malaysia, is without exception (Mohd Rajib and Faridah 2005).

An analysis of local TV programs showed that entertainment programs especially reality TV flood the channels of almost every TV station in the country. Five years ago, only ASTRO had its debut reality TV show in the form of *Akademi Fantasia* and 8TV had its first *Malaysian Idol*, modeled after the *American Idol*. Today almost every channel in the country jump in the bandwagon, even the government owned RTM 1 has brought back its once famous singing competition program in the 70s, called *Bintang RTM* (translation: RTM Stars). *Akademi Fantasia 5* is currently in season. Apart from that, from a local flavour, TV3 has its *Jom Heboh* (it started out with *Sure Heboh*) every

weekend featuring local artists, bringing in millions in terms of profits. RTM1 also has its weekender entertainment program featuring local artists (Mohd Rajib and Faridah 2005).

It can be seen that although all of these reality TV programs have more or less similar concepts, in terms of people's participation through voting via the SMS (short message system), the programs still stand as popular programs compared to other programs. Mustafa (2006) states that such a programme actually offers contrived 'consumer democracy' where viewers are requested to make choices through voting via mobile phones (SMS). But questions need to be asked as to who the real beneficiaries of new media technologies are : potentially, these would include advertisers, TV stations and providers of mobile phones.

Looking at the media ownership concentration as discussed earlier, any media critics would say that the consolidation indicates that the media industry has become increasingly commercialized, working towards enhancing corporate profits rather than evaluating the impact of conglomeration on the diversity of news and content.

These developments are important points that need to be addressed explicitly. Media mergers, is a global phenomenon and it is here to stay. Basically, the main aim is to liberalise media as a result of privatization and deregulation policies initiated by the government to reduce their burden of supporting or subsidizing media operations. Hence, such a move needs to be dealt with an open mind. Perhaps we may one day see a global media made-in-Malaysia.

On the other side of the coin, we are confronted with issues of Western influence on our local culture to the extent of homogenizing ethnic identities. The question of cultural mixing and hybridization are important aspects that Malaysians need to look at. Surely, citizens of Malaysia would not want to be swept by the global wave. Malaysians need to learn to ride the wave.

## **Global Peace Via Peace Journalism Options: A Malaysian Experience**

In the 1990s we witnessed wars via the mass media: death of thousands in several warring states and millions in others. The media, both local and international, had shown war in Afghanistan, Sudan, Rwanda, Angola, Bosnia, Guatemala, Liberia, Burundi, Algeria, border conflict



between Ethiopia and Eritrea, fighting in Colombia, the never-ending Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, southeastern Turkey, Sierra Leone, Northern Ireland, Kosovo, and the latest Iraq. We also witnessed numerous acts of terrorism for instance 9/11 in America and the 7/7 bomb blast in the British capital.

So how does a non-warring country such as Malaysia report war? For the purpose of illustrations, this paper looked into examples taken in a study conducted by the writer in 2002. On a quick glance of media content, over a period of two months (March and April 2002) – in both print and electronic media alike – it was found that war coverage was definitely not missing in the daily news diet. The two-months period in 2002 was purposively selected because of its representation of peacetime period, months after the U.S-Afghanistan war and months before the U.S-Iraq war under the administration of President Bush Jr. News about war came mostly from the international news agencies, Reuters, Agence France Presse (AFP), Associate Press (AP), to a lesser extent from the Malaysian national news agency, BERNAMA (basically non-combat military news) and also from other news agencies such as Xinhua of China, Yon Hap of South Korea, ANTARA of Indonesia, not forgetting Cable News Network (CNN) and Al-Jazeera. But of course, based on interviews with several media practitioners (2002 and 2003), the western international news agencies were the most popular among local media diet where war news were concerned. The reason for the choice is basically that news coverage from these western agencies are very advanced with accompanying up-to-date and superb visuals, news reels and actualities.

How do Malaysian media identify war news? Basically war news comprise of events pertaining to military actions and acts of terrorism. Military actions include issues on combat, armed invasion, military talks, supplies and provisions, armed deployment and the like. We also looked at efforts undertaken by governments and leaders, and also world organizations to resolve conflicts and try to achieve peace through diplomatic talks, relations and missions. Over the period of study, about 138 or 15.8 percent out of 898 news items contained war news coverage. A closer look at the coverage of war news by these newspapers demonstrate that there are more issues pertaining to “terrorism” in the *New Straits Times* (NST) while more military news comprising of military actions and combat are covered in the *Star* (TS),

*Utusan Malaysia* (UM) and *Berita Harian* (BH).

Issues pertaining to “terrorism” highlighted by these papers, especially NST, were more on international discussions or talks on the issues and lesser on the act itself. Some of the areas touched were efforts to define terrorism, global conference held to discuss issues on terror, the role that the United Nations should play to stop blatant aggression while other news were on acts of terrorism such as suicide bombing and bomb blast. Top coverage of war news in the Malaysian media were the long-time Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the aftermath of war in Afghanistan and also on Iraq, being the next target of the U.S to exterminate terrorism (as the world had witnessed several months later).

During this period of analysis, Malaysia came out as an active country expressing views on “terrorism” and suggesting strategies to tackle “terrorism” without aggression, and Dr Mahathir Mohamad (then, the Prime Minister) was seen to use international forums such as the OIC to champion the cause. Countries frequently mentioned in the news pertaining to terrorism and war news were the United States, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Indonesia, Philippines, Iraq which was in the midst of a continuous crisis, while the Philippines was encountering problems with the Abu Sayyaf group and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Indonesia with its Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

The electronic media also showed similar trends as the print media during the period of study. Like the Malaysian dailies, the electronic media in this country is dependent on the dominant four international news agencies for foreign news with AFP and Reuters remaining their favourite suppliers of news, news reels, actualities and visuals. A news producer told the writers in an interview that these two agencies are popular among Malaysian media organizations because of their “more or less” unbiased coverage.

Virtually whose side are the media on? Looking at the Malaysian media, it can be seen that the media reflect the situation of the government and the society in which they operate. The principle of non-aligned remains in tact within Malaysian foreign policy and this is reflected in the mass media. Malaysia within the non-aligned group, has assumed an active and assertive role. Today in Malaysia non-aligned does not mean just a passive adherence to the sanctimonious declaration of the principles and ideas of the non-aligned philosophy. It has long been the

hope of Malaysian leaders that the non-aligned movement not remain mere ideals but must be translated into effective action to free the world from domination by the strong over the weak in all fields (Munir Majid quoting Mahathir Mohamad, 1983). The principles of non-aligned, termed simply as neutral, are reflected in the newspapers. There is a tendency within the media to combine news from the international news agencies, namely Reuters, AFP and AP and publish it under the, *Agencies*. An editor said that this is one way gatekeepers try to increase neutrality and reduce biases (Ahmad Talib 2003).

In whose words do the Malaysian media subscribe to in explaining war to the people? With the shortage of trained staff, funds and equipment, the Malaysian newspapers, like their counterparts in most developing countries are still dependent on the dominant four international news agencies for foreign news, especially war news. Only of late, after the 2003 Iraq War that the Malaysian editors saw the need to train Malaysian journalists to be war correspondents. We can see that Gandy's information subsidy model is applicable here. Basically, war news sources come from the protagonist of war quoted by the news agencies. The following are headlines that indicate this trend: '*Osama e-mail slams Saudi peace plan*'; *Britain boleh serang Iraq tanpa mandat PBB – Hoon/ translation: Britain can attack Iraq without UN's Mandate – Hoon*'; '*Bush tuntutan Yasser henti pembunuhan/translation: Bush demands Yasser to halt killing*'; '*Amaran keras Putera Abdullah kepada Powell/translation: Harsh warning from Prince Abdullah to Powell*'.

Obviously most headlines, reflect what are being said in the news and sub editors take queues from the lead paragraph to help them write the lead. However, sub-editors can choose the right words and terms and not be trapped with labels and judgments. But sometimes due to insensitivity, you get such headlines that could create more animosity, such as this particular headline published in Utusan Malaysia 13 April 2002: '*Dunia kian marah kepada Israel/translation: The world is angry with Israel*'. The question we may ask is what connotes the word 'world'? Is it representative of the whole world? Or 'the world' means only France, Germany and a couple of Southeast Asian countries as suggested in the AFP's story.

This study has shown that while care is taken by local gatekeepers to create a more presentable war news by combining news from Reuters,



AP, UPI and AFP and place them under 'Agencies', the local media are still far from propagating world peace.

So how do the media, both global and local, propagate peace? Every media conglomerate has an agenda, be it an international or a national media conglomerate. When war is on the agenda, the illusion of objectivity can be a cloak for war mongering. This form of war journalism demonises the enemy and patronises the victims. Hence, it will conceal or ignore peace initiatives.

How does the options of peace journalism entail? According to a local gatekeeper, the concept of peace journalism acts as a timely and welcome antidote to much of what passes for war journalism. It is an alternative, not polemic. The elements of peace journalism are not new; part political analysis, part investigative journalism, part socially responsible reporting, part advocacy journalism in the interests of peace (Johann Galtung in Bunn Negara, 2003: 6).

Peace journalism proposes that journalists take up the role as educators who could well inform and educate the public on the background, contexts and origins of global media content, providing a multidimensional setting in their reports. These, of course need training, media literacy and sensitization programs, conducted among journalists and the public.

Those propagating peace journalism consciously adopt an agenda for peace believing it to be the only genuine alternative to an agenda for war. In the process of information gathering and dissemination, these groups map the pre-violence conflict, identifying many parties and more causes, thereby opening up unexpected paths towards dialogue and peace making. The existence of the various international bodies and world organizations such as OIC, NAM and the like, stand on this premise.

## **Recommendations**

Based on some observations and a prescriptive analysis of the global media content, initiatives could be taken based on the following agenda:

- a. **The educational agenda:** The media and universities could help to educate the masses on the roles of global media and how they tick.

Understanding how the global media operate, will help sensitize people on the hidden agenda highlighted through selected issues. Educating the media and the masses on peace journalism should be an immediate step to be taken.

- b. **The societal agenda:** NGOs and community groups as well as activists and citizens at large could play important roles in sensitizing people regarding global media, global journalism and peace journalism options through campaigns and advocacy efforts.
- c. **The mass media agenda:** Media practitioners should be sensitized on the importance of packaging news. They need to develop their own model and guidelines on how to propagate peace via news and information.
- d. **The policy agenda:** The government needs to review some provisions with regard to media conglomerates and mergers and identify relevant policies that will create a balanced media system that is beneficial to both the media and the audience.

## **Conclusion**

While it can be seen that Malaysia and other nations in the South-south region of the world are right to be concerned about protecting their people and national culture against this new form of imperialism by the so-called global media, it should be pointed out that news and information via the global media is part of a larger industrial model that is being actively perused by local governments to develop their nations' economy. A nation cannot progress and industrialise without information in peace time.

In democracies, people like to believe that what they are doing for themselves and for other people are right and what their countries are doing are generally good. To go to war, and not go to war or refrain from any kind of involvement in war - all these have their own legitimate reasons. But when the media report war, under the notion of public's right to know and upholding their social responsibility goal, the 'story of war' takes a different turn. Parties to a conflict behave differently because the media is there, and will try to influence war news or peace negotiations coverage to their advantage. Managing public opinion and controlling people's perception in time of war, through words



maneuvering becomes a matter of great concern for warring states. But the media through peace journalism options can even play a greater and more noble role.

On a positive note, various research by media and communication scholars have shown that the media are the catalyst that spearheaded progress and their important role in building a country's national image and economy cannot be denied. The question we are here to answer today is whether the invisible baggage i.e the culture of news and information consumption among local people, that comes with the global media cost too much? Can the global media carry peace information amidst other infortainment commodities? This is where media literacy and language sensitivities come in. It is thus important that the media help to highlight by giving the emphasis to the importance of peace journalism which is likely to continue to be hybridized over the coming years, but nevertheless, a significant aspect that could be played by the global media.

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